

## **Mental Health Update**

May 6, 2005

### **Commissioner Thanks Vermont State Hospital Staff for Professional Performance**

Health Commissioner Dr. Paul Jarris has written to the staff at Vermont State Hospital to express his personal appreciation and that of the administration for the staff's "exemplary response" in dealing with an incident at the hospital last Sunday.

The event took place on the Brooks 1 Unit, where certain individuals began taunting staff and engaging in disruptive and dangerous behavior. The escalation of dangerous behavior caused staff from all units to be called to assist. Staff worked quickly and remained professional throughout the event. All appropriate protocols were followed, and the hospital was returned to normal.

### **Corrections Signs Quality Oversight Agreement with Health Department**

The commissioners of Health and of Corrections have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (posted at <http://www.healthyvermonters.info/mh/mhindex.shtml>) that sets out a quality improvement (QI) structure for the health care services provided to inmates of Vermont correctional facilities and defines the respective roles of the two departments as they relate to QI. Under the agreement, the Department of Corrections (DOC) is responsible for delivery of health care services that include mental health and substance abuse treatment. The Health Department is responsible for the following:

- Independent assessment of the quality of care provided to inmates.
- Independent assessment of sentinel events (such as deaths) for the purpose of identifying systemic issues and process shortcomings.
- Preparation of quality assessment reports.
- Collaboration with DOC in the development of the QI plan.
- Collaboration with DOC in carrying out the QI plan.

### **Vermont State Hospital Discharge Tracking**

Beginning March 1, the department's Mental Health Acute Care Team began a new method of tracking the care and services provided to patients who are discharged from the Vermont State Hospital and patients who are on Orders of Non-hospitalization (ONH).

The Acute Care Team is notified of a discharge from the Vermont State Hospital admissions office. The acute care manager makes contact with the designated agency case manager (or other person as indicated) or other community contact within one week after the date of discharge or start of the ONH. After the first month, the acute care manager continues the tracking once a month for one year from the date of discharge or start of the ONH.

The team is currently following 19 individuals under the new method. Of those 19:

- 1 individual was readmitted to Vermont State Hospital.
- 1 individual was discharged to Corrections and subsequently admitted to the Brattleboro Retreat.
- 2 individuals were discharged to a designated hospital.
- 11 individuals were discharged to services at a community mental health center and are continuing to receive services.
- 4 individuals were discharged to services at a community mental health center and were re-hospitalized at a hospital other than Vermont State Hospital, with a return to the community mental health center.
- 5 individuals are on an ONH.

### **Draft Suicide Prevention Plan Posted**

The state suicide prevention plan drafted by Vermonters for Suicide Prevention has been posted for comment. (See <http://www.healthyvermonters.info/mh/mhindex.shtml>) You may send feedback to, or obtain more information from, Charlie Biss ([cbiss@vdh.state.vt.us](mailto:cbiss@vdh.state.vt.us)), Melissa Bailey ([mbailey@vdh.state.vt.us](mailto:mbailey@vdh.state.vt.us)), or Tracy M. Phillips ([tphilli@vdh.state.vt.us](mailto:tphilli@vdh.state.vt.us)). The group, a broad coalition of educators, public and mental health professionals, youth advocates and other interested parties, will meet from 1-3 p.m. on May 11 at the Health Department in Burlington.

### **Methamphetamine Prevention Initiative**

The Department of Health is working with the Department of Public Safety and the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council to provide 24 two-hour Methamphetamine Information Sessions for Community Professionals at 12 sites around the state from June through November. (Schedule information will be posted on the Department of Health website.)

Methamphetamine typically is produced using common drug store or farm supply ingredients in makeshift labs that may become contaminated toxic chemical sites. Fires are common and endanger firefighters, first responders and others who might be in a building where meth production is taking place, such as an apartment building or a motel. In addition, children who spend time in meth labs bring toxic chemicals to school on their clothes and hands – endangering themselves and their classmates.

The community sessions are targeted to community members who do home visiting, to hotel and motel owners, to people who sell products that could be used to make methamphetamine, to first responders, to medical professionals, and to waste haulers and trash pickup companies. The goal is to raise local awareness and address the problem of methamphetamine production proactively before producers gain a foothold in Vermont. The Department of Public Safety is sponsoring the sessions with funding from Senator Patrick Leahy's office that is targeted to preventing methamphetamine production and abuse in Vermont.

### **FAHC Contract**

FAHC representatives met with Human Services Secretary Mike Smith and Health Commissioner Jarris this week to discuss the proposed clinical services contract for Vermont State Hospital. All agreed on their commitment to complete the contract, which would begin on July 1. Discussions will continue on the contract's scope of services.

### **AHS Secretary Chooses Advisors**

Following up on comments he made at the recent meeting of the Vermont State Hospital Future Planning Advisory Group, Human Services Secretary Mike Smith has asked a small number of individuals to advise him on mental health policy matters. The advisors, nicknamed the "kitchen cabinet," will meet on May 17. Members include Anne Donahue, Diane Snelling, Todd Centybear, Bob Pierattini, Jerry Goessel, Ken Liberto and Linda Corey.

### **Public Psychiatry Seminar Series**

The University of Vermont College of Medicine and the Vermont State Hospital presented "Asperger's Syndrome and Antisocial Personality: Is There a Link?" on Thursday, as the inaugural meeting of the Public Psychiatry Seminar Series. This series, directed by Vermont State Hospital Medical Director Dr. Tom Simpatico, is a collaborative effort between Fletcher Allen Health Care and state hospital staff. The purpose is to provide public mental health professionals and other interested parties with a means of sharing their knowledge and expertise with one another.

The format of the seminar will be to use redacted case presentations/discussions, alternating with lectures/discussions. The intent is to create an academic forum in which public mental health professionals can gather and learn from each other. CME, CEU and CLE credit will be available to seminar attendees in the near future. Upcoming seminars will be announced here and on the Health Department website.

### **Deputy Search**

The deputy search advisory group is reviewing a draft screening tool for use in evaluating applicants for deputy commissioner of health for mental health services. The draft screening tool, developed from the job description posted for public comment on April 1 and input from the advisors' meeting on April 20, is posted at [www.healthyvermonters.info/mh/mhindex.shtml](http://www.healthyvermonters.info/mh/mhindex.shtml).

Comments may be sent to Dave Cote ([dcote@vdh.state.vt.us](mailto:dcote@vdh.state.vt.us)) through May 11, after which the document will be finalized. The advisors may meet again, but expect to conduct most of their business by phone and email. The current decision-making timeline, which will be amended as needed, calls for identifying candidates for phone interviews by the end of the month and holding those interviews on or about June 7. After the top few candidates have been selected, they will be invited to participate in a meet-the-public, question-and-answer session at a date to be announced.

### **Vermont State Hospital – Court Ordered Population**

As of Wednesday, 40 percent of the Vermont State Hospital population consisted of forensic patients. In the past six weeks, we have seen a 100 percent increase in this court-ordered population.

Vermont State Hospital is currently the only hospital designated in statute to receive court-ordered patients for forensic evaluations. The Department of Health is strongly promoting passage of legislation this session to allow for the Commissioner of Health to transfer a patient to another hospital for forensic evaluation when clinically appropriate. This would greatly assist in managing the census at the hospital.

### **Hospital Census**

The Vermont State Hospital census was 48 as of midnight Wednesday night. The census since the beginning of the year is indicated by the following chart; the average daily census was 45.6.

